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Empowering Our Ministry: Spiritual Gifts (I)

1 Corinthians 12:1-7

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BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

This morning we return to a focus on spiritual renewal, or as I like to say, spiritual awakening. It's an emphasis begun last August, interrupted now and then by guest ministers and seasonal themes. The presumption I bring to the pulpit is that there is far more power available to this congregation than we have traditionally accessed. We have walked a way of belief in the Father and the way of salvation through the Son, but have ignored the Holy Spirit. And that's so odd because it is the Holy Spirit who is Emmanuel, God-With-Us, the way it was meant to be from the day of the first Pentecost several thousand years ago.

The Holy Spirit's job is to come and dwell internally in all those who profess Christ as Lord; to convict and convince and persuade concerning sin; to remind people of Jesus and give the words of the Word to speak when disciples are feeling a memory loss; to guide people to salvation; to help build koinonia-community; and the Holy Spirit empower us for ministry by giving us spiritual gifts.

That's the focus this morning, to begin to share with you the Biblical teaching on spiritual gifts. My hope is plain and simple: when people discover their spiritual gifts, they will begin to use them. When you use your spiritual gifts in ministry areas that match your gift, you will be more effective. My vision is that within a few years, 90% of our congregation will be involved in gift-matched ministry.

What is a spiritual gift? A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the body of Christ to be used to build up the body of Christ. Let me break that down a bit.

First, spiritual gifts are given to believers only. It's possible to join this congregation, or affiliate with CPC, and not be a Christian. It's possible to affiliate with any congregation in Vacaville and not be a Christian. Elders here and leaders of other congregations are supposed to be discerning and 'man the gate' to ensure that people are, indeed, Christians, but we're all human, and none of us knows everything, and it's always possible to say the right words without integrity. There's always unbelief within a church. Only God knows the heart. Some people think they are Christian because they go to church; some people think they are Christian because they behave in socially acceptable ways. But being a Christian is a different. It's making a decision to ask Jesus to be your Savior and your Lord.

If you have asked Jesus to come into your life and be your Savior and your Lord, then you are a Christian. When you became a Christian, at that point, the Holy Spirit gave you a spiritual gift or a mix of spiritual gifts. The problem is that most people don't know what their gift or gift mix is, and of course don't know how to put the gift or gift mix to work.

I need to mention here that the concept of the body of Christ is crucially important. The 'body' is the principal metaphor used in the Bible to describe the Church. The idea is simple. Some of us are hands, some of us are feet, some of us are eyes, some are ears, some of us represent limbs that are in plain view and some of us represent organs of the body that are hidden because they are under the skin, but all of us are parts of the body, and the body needs all of us to be a fully functioning body. Jesus is the head and the brain and the director, but we are the body.

Now, if we are supposed to be a body, how are we supposed to make decisions? What does the organizational chart look like? What is the chain of command? It's not a benevolent dictatorship with one person ruling the body. It's not a democracy where all members rule. It is an organism with Christ as the head and with each member functioning with a spiritual gift or mix of spiritual gifts.

Every single person who is born-again, who is a Christian, has the Holy Spirit dwelling within. The Holy Spirit came in when you invited Jesus in as Savior and Lord. And the Holy Spirit brought you this thing called a 'spiritual gift.' So, every Christian has a spiritual gift, at least one, possibly more than one. Why? Because the body needs these divinely given spiritual gifts in order to function. Our individual use of our spiritual gifts is what fuels our individual part of the body; our gifts are what makes the body work.

Which of course raises the question whether we are helping to do our part in making the body, the church, work? If we don't know what our spiritual gift or gift mix is, how can we use our spiritual gift to help the body, the church, work at peak efficiency? The simple answer is that if we can't identify our gift or gifts, we can't use them efficiently, and the body suffers by not moving as swiftly as it could, or suffers by having some critical part atrophy from lack of use.

So, Christians who hear this Biblical teaching will naturally want to learn about spiritual gifts, and will naturally want to discover their spiritual gift or mix of gifts, and will want to begin to use these gifts in the most effective and efficient manner possible. That's my presumption. My belief is that if we can discover our spiritual gifts and learn to develop them, we will begin to use them, and God will begin to use us far more powerfully than He has been able to use us in the past. It's a truly exciting time in the life of our church. The real adventure is just beginning!

I've just mentioned the three main goals everyone should have, but let me put them out again in a simple way. D-D-U = (1) Discover your spiritual gift, (2) Develop your spiritual gift, and (3) Use your spiritual gift (or gifts). Discover, Develop, Use. That's what we need to do.

Now, please let me answer three of the most obvious questions about spiritual gifts. First, why do you want us to Discover our gifts before moving to Develop them? And second, what will be different about us if we are efficiently using a spiritual gift? Third, how are gifts the same or different from natural talents?

First, why do we need to Discover our gifts before moving to Develop them? Well, the Bible clearly teaches that the gift or gifts we may possess have already been given to us by the Holy Spirit. They are received, not achieved. No one chooses their spiritual gift or gifts. The Holy Spirit decides who gets which one. The only thing we do understand is that between us, all of the spiritual gifts to be given have been given. In this church, we have present all of the spiritual gifts there are to have. And the Spirit has given us all the ones listed in the Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.

There's a non-exhaustive list spiritual gifts on the back of your Sermon Notes this morning. I don't expect you to understand the definitions yet, because that's where some of the sermons in the future are going, to explain these spiritual gifts and give examples. And we have a 'spiritual gifts inventory' instrument which will help you discover the gift or gifts the Holy Spirit has given you. But it's hard to take that inventory, to answer the questions, unless you understand why we have spiritual gifts, and what they're for. But that's the direction I'm going: Discover --- Develop --- Use, so that we might be a functional, whole, body of Christ = the church Jesus intends us to be.

Second, what will be different about us if we are efficiently using a spiritual gift? If you are using the spiritual gift that has been given to you, in a ministry that matches with this gift, you will be FRUITFUL and FULFILLED. You will be effective in the use of this gift, you will feel supercharged, and you will have a deeply profound sense that you are doing the right ministry. You'll be in the groove. Your ministry efforts will be fruitful and you will feel you are in the right place, doing the right thing. You will rejoice in the work God is calling you to do.

Third, how are spiritual gifts related to or different from natural talents? We have to remember why we have been given spiritual gifts. We have spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ, the church. That's what they're for. That's where they're used. When I use my spiritual gift in the context of my life as a part of the body, I am fruitful and fulfilled. Can I use my spiritual gift outside the body? Maybe. Maybe not.

I know of one woman who is a gifted teacher of children with special needs in a public school system in southern California. This is natural talent, and she's very, very effective with these children. But when she tries to be a teacher in the life of her church, she flops. She tries hard, she knows the Bible inside and out, but in her case, she doesn't have the spiritual gift of teaching. She has a natural talent but not a spiritual gift.

I know of another person who has the spiritual gift of teaching, who is incredibly effective in sharing God's Word with people inside the church, but who can't keep an audience interested outside the church. This man has the spiritual gift but not the natural talent.

It may be that your natural talent is also a spiritual gift, or it may not work that way. It just depends on the Holy Spirit since, as I said before, we don't get to choose our spiritual gift. We certainly can practice a talent and get better and better at using a talent. And we can certainly discover a spiritual gift, and by developing it, we can use it in a way that makes us more fruitful and fulfilled. But they're not necessarily the same.

Holy Spirit-given spiritual gifts are given to build up the body of Christ. When we use them , we use them in the context of the body of Christ. I know one man who has a natural talent, which he has developed, to design and build homes. He's very good at craftsmanship. So people assume that he should get involved with our Facilities Ministry Team - we'd call him a natural. But, you know, one of the reasons this man is not so involved in the life of the church is that he intuitively knows that this craftsmanship, though it is one of the spiritual gifts, is not his spiritual gift.

Similarly, people who are school teachers by profession are often asked to serve as Sunday School teachers. That can be a problem. Why? Because they have a natural talent, and training, to be effective as public or private school teachers, but they

may not have this as a spiritual gift. And it comes across as a sense of reluctance to say 'yes' to the church school recruitment effort. And the teacher feels guilty for saying no, when they shouldn't. They shouldn't feel guilty … we shouldn't have asked, because we all should be focusing on matching our spiritual gifts with the right ministries.

So, there you have it. A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the body of Christ to be used to build up the body of Christ, which is also known as the church. What would happen if everyone in our church decides to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gift? Five things. First, each member of the body will know his or her spiritual job description. Second, all members of the body will be able to work together in love, harmony, and effectiveness, thus avoiding pride, envy and false humility. Third, the whole body will mature. Fourth, the church will grow. And fifth, God will be glorified.

Sounds good to me. How 'bout you?

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

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